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051318Z Dec 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 009372

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2010

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SUBJECT: KING REVIEWS DOMESTIC ISSUES, REFORM AGENDA

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale, Reasons 1.4, (B) & (D)

11. (C) Summary: The King believes the aftermath of the November 9 bombings has given him the political upperhand to compel parliamentary passage of key reformist legislation. His Prime Minister is less certain, predicting an easy vote of confidence but controversy over the budget. Both leaders assure Ambassador that ratification of the Article 98 agreement and adoption of the draft anti-money laundering bill are top priorities, along with a new election law and a controversial belt-tightening budget. End Summary.

12. (C) Immediately after delivering his speech from the throne reconvening parliament, the King hosted lunch for resident EU and G-8 ambassadors on December 1. Key points follow:

--Acknowledging he had considered dissolving parliament and calling early elections in order to overcome parliamentary opposition to reform, the King said the November 9 bombings had changed the dynamics. He had decided to bring parliament back, as it was critical now to build on national unity, not undercut it. He also needed parliament's endorsement of new security laws necessitated by the bombings, and its help in making sure those laws do not have negative effects on human rights and political reform. In a one-on-one with Ambassador after the lunch, the King said he was giving the current parliament "one last chance" to support the reform agenda. He believed that members were sobered by his unpublicized but now widely known threat to dissolve parliament. They now would be less tempted to challenge the King's program at a time of national unity. In short, the bombings had given the King a degree of political strength unseen since the death of his father, King Hussein. He said he still anticipated parliamentary elections sometime in late 2006, about a year earlier than planned. His current thinking is to dissolve parliament only on the eve of those elections, allowing just enough time for a brief campaign season without generating concerns he was seeking to rule without a legislature.

--The King's parliamentary priorities were: adoption of party and election laws that will improve parliamentary representation on a one-man, one-vote system; establishment of an ombudsman and an independent anti-corruption unit; accelerated privatization and a new tax regime to help the private sector and improve public finances; and a concerted campaign to eliminate poverty and unemployment. As Jordan undertook the difficult campaign against terrorism, it would need to provide a social safety net to the poor, and needed continued foreign assistance to do so. The King appealed to the EU/G-8 to continue to support Jordan. (Prime Minister Bakheet separately told Ambassador he doubted a majority of Parliament would pass an election law that will disadvantage many incumbents, but would do his best. If the current Parliament adopted a reform election law, he personally saw no need for early elections. Privately, both leaders told Ambassador ratification of the Article 98 agreement and adoption of an anti-money laundering law were top priorities as well.)

--The "gloves are off" now in Jordan's battle against takfiri extremism, the King said, but he would not violate basic human rights. Persons using extremist rhetoric to incite terrorism would be taken to court. If guilty, they would be fined, but not jailed. He would also insist the Islamic Action Front-dominated charities and unions open their financial books for transparent examination, and pay taxes. He said no draconian steps were contemplated. Alone with Ambassador, the King has expressed on several recent occasions his unhappiness with a perceived Qatari policy ) through al-Jazeera ) of promoting the takfiri message and attacking Jordan. He described Jordanian-Qatari relations as rapidly deteriorating and said he would not stand aside while al-Jazeera incited terrorism. On December 5 he passed along a paper detailing Qatar's offenses, which post will provide to NEA.

HALE